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THURSDAY
MAY 6, 1954

Thought for the day — I wonder if the luxuriance of hair, so notable in Italian men and women, is due to the free use of oil in their diet.

Jim and Mary went off at 7:30 this morning on their motor trek back to Rome. Raining today, cold enough, as usual, for an overcoat.

We hired a car and left at 1:30 p.m. for what turned out to be a long and excessively fast drive, in the course of which the high spot was seeing the exterior of Countess Volpi's villa at Maser and the Rizzonico villa at Bassano. There were more than a dozen others, visible from the road, in varying stages of fallen grandeur, any of which would be eagerly and expensively purchased if they were within a hundred miles of Washington, or indeed any other large city at home. The old Venetians certainly did themselves well when they took to the country for a change of air.

The central mass of the Rizzonico is forbidding, but the colonnades and gardens, teeming with ancient statues and wisteria, superlative. As for the Villa Maser . it seemed to us perfection and, so timeless is its style, almost incredible it had been designed by Palladio and built in the Sixteenth Century. I could go on forever wandering about this countryside looking at houses.

Tommy had telephoned me at lunchtime and I am to go from Paris to Luxembourg tomorrow, I fear by automobile, since I shall arrive too late for the morning train, and there is no aeroplane on Friday.

We took the 5:50 train from Padua and along the line to and past Vicenza there were still graceful villas to be glimpsed. Am reading that rich history, "The Civilization of the Renaissance in Italy", by the Swiss scholar Jacob Burckhardt. It seems almost inconceivable that its merit was only recognized many years after its initial publication.

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